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NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Judicial Council Oversight Group recommends “indefinite delay” to seven Courthouse Construction Projects

Ongoing budget cuts to the branch drive cut-backs

After two-and-a-half days and 26 hours of public meetings that ended last Friday, the Court Facilities Working Group (CFWG) is recommending that seven new courthouse construction projects be indefinitely delayed, one project be moved to the Trial Court Facility Modifications Working Group for consideration, and the remaining 23 projects proceed and move forward subject to funding availability or other considerations. The recommendations will be taken up by the Judicial Council at its October 26, 2012 meeting for review.

“Because of the deep cuts to the judicial branch budget—\$544 million this last year—our working group was left with the deeply difficult and disappointing task of delaying necessary court construction projects that would have gone ahead under a better fiscal environment,” said Justice Brad Hill, the chair of the CFWG. “I have to commend those courts that stepped up to the plate and made deep cuts in their own project budgets, and numerous other courts that have pledged to make significant additional cuts.”

After the judicial branch budget was slashed earlier this year, Justice Hill and the working group invited each of the 24 courts with one or more of the 31 projects to submit a proposal, demonstrating why each project should move forward with the branch’s limited funds. During the meeting, judges and court administrators making the presentations often faced difficult questions. “In the prior five years, we were working in a more perfect world,” Justice Hill explained to one group of court presenters. “The current state of economy and the reduction in the judicial branch budget, however, has turned that world upside down. Faced with a cataclysmic type of budget, we had to ask the tough questions.”

The list of projects will be posted on the CFWG website for two weeks for public comment, and later this month the working group will meet to confirm final recommendations. Once the Judicial Council reviews and either accepts or adjusts the CFWG recommendations, projects slated to move forward will be reviewed by a cost-reduction subcommittee chaired by Justice Jeffrey W. Johnson. “Given the current economic environment, we remain ever vigilant stewards of the taxpayer’s money,” he said. “I predict that those projects recommended for construction will face considerable reductions in size, scope, and cost.”

Justice Hill went on to comment about those courthouses that have been indefinitely delayed. “Since funding for court construction comes out of court user fees, we hope that next year the branch’s funds won’t be swept as they have been over the last two years, and that all courthouse projects, including those that have been delayed, will be able to move forward immediately and become a reality for the communities that so desperately need them.”

Today’s recommendation to halt the seven projects does not affect the 17 other courthouse projects (eight in construction and nine in working drawings through different funding sources) already in construction.

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